

Edgeworthia chrysantha

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Mystery plant: Edgeworthia chrysantha (Paper bush)

In February, a friend sent me a photo of a plant she had come across on a walk and asked me to identify it. She described an intoxicating, tropical perfume with clusters of largish, yellow flowers covering the bare branches. I was stumped and tentatively offered Daphne.



Although a member of the Daphne family, we identified our mystery plant as Edgeworthia chrysantha, a beautiful shrub rarely found in west coast gardens. A rarity here, Edgeworthia was introduced to Britain in the mid 1800's. Amateur botanist, Michael Pakenham Edgeworth collected Edgeworthia from the Himalayan region while also working as an administrator for the East India Company.

Over 150 years ago two botanical names for the same plant were submitted within weeks of each other with E. chrysantha (golden flowers) published before the E. papyrifera (paper producing) submission.

Edgeworthia is a genus of three species with only chrysantha in cultivation. Interestingly, it is cultivated extensively in Japan and China as a source of high quality paper from the bark (bank notes and calligraphy).



I returned in April to find a lingering fragrance with blossoms still clustered on cinnamon/red coloured bark.



Although the springtime blooms and fragrance are the most memorable aspects of this plant, *E. chrysantha*, in winter, after the leaves have dropped, is striking and covered in silky, 1-inch buds which hang from the branches like tassels.



E. chrysantha grows in moist, fertile and well-drained soil. It prefers a protected, east-facing location but can tolerate full shade. In its' natural habitat it grows from 300-1600 meters in elevation, often near streams. Full size is approx. 6' x 6' and is considered hardy to -5 to -7C. It can be easily damaged by frosts.

E. chrysantha can be propagated from seeds but more successfully from semi-ripe cuttings in summer. There are no known pests or diseases and pruning is usually not necessary.

This beautiful shrub is considered ideal for mixed shrub and perennial borders. However, we have seen *E. chrysantha* thriving in large, east-facing pots. The plant below was measured at 7 ft. across!

Under plantings of snowdrops, crocus and tulips make good companions.



Edgeworthia chrysantha is a relative unknown here, on the coast, and deserves greater recognition. Not only is it a sensational spring-flowering shrub, in summer, the oblong, grey-green leaves have their own attraction. The silky, silver buds in fall and winter are attractive and should make this plant a highly desirable all season garden favourite.

References:

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